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PREFACE

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PREFACE

This volume is based on the seventh International Research Forum of African Studies (IRFAS-KU): Role of African Area Studies in the “African Crisis.”⁽¹⁾ This forum was held in Kyoto on February 24, 2012. It was sponsored and organized by Center for African Area Studies, Kyoto University and co-organized by the African Local Knowledge (*Zairaiichi*) Research Group.⁽²⁾ The organizing committee of this seventh forum regarded the current situation, in which craftworks produced by people in Africa have been replaced by industrial materials, such as plastic containers and ironware, as a crisis affecting African local knowledge and techniques.

The discussion among the organizers in the process of narrowing the central focus of the seventh forum addressed the importance of how people who were engaged in craftworks and the use of their craftworks were influenced by the penetration of industrial goods and how their lifestyles were affected in terms of the crisis affecting local knowledge and techniques. Artisans producing craftworks in Africa usually belong to groups of craft workers culturally and socially, but are marginalized in most societies and ethnic groups. Traditionally, the craft workers are restricted by gender. For example, in most African societies, female potters produce earthenware, while male blacksmiths produce ironworks. This forum regarded their local knowledge and techniques as their cultural and social practices, and examined the social transformation involved in the crisis. The forum title was: Emerging Approaches to Understanding Gender-based Knowledge and Techniques in Africa.⁽³⁾

The production and use of craftworks in Ethiopia are unique among African societies. Although craftworks have been replaced by industrial goods, such as plastic containers and ironwork, as in most African countries, the people in Ethiopia use both industrial goods and craftworks. To examine these phenomena, the contributors to this volume examined the strong connections between people and craftworks in their cultural and social practices through long-term field studies in Ethiopia. Naturally, most of the researchers focused on both the craftworks and related practices based on local knowledge and techniques. We consider one of the characteristics of their local knowledge and techniques (*zairaiichi* in Japanese) as the result of requiring daily practices and experiences.⁽⁴⁾

The dynamics of local knowledge and techniques are closely correlated with the gender roles in technological and daily practices, and might reflect the social roles and local politics within their ethnic groups and communities. Most contributors to this volume took an approach that not only involved observing the production of craftworks and the technological practices involved, but also collecting the discourses of the craft workers.

J.W. Arthur focused on the strong connections between people and pots in terms of cultural and social practices involved in the use of pots among the Gamo

of southwestern Ethiopia. He addressed this issue by using the lifecycle and chain operatoire approach, and described the social relationships (e.g., patron–client relationships) involved in the sequence of pottery-making. Itagaki who did his Ph.D. research on Amhara weavers in northern Ethiopia, found that new male workers who were migrants and imprisoned criminals had joined weavers. This was based on analyses of the process of weaving, and their production network based on a division of labor. He proposed that weavers were not traditionally marginalized culturally and socially. However, there was a very low proportion of female weavers and the few females were primarily engaged in spinning, except in very rare cases.

Three contributors in this volume, K.W. Arthur, Kaneko, and Thubauville, discussed the relationships between women's life histories and changes in their local knowledge. All of them examined the local knowledge and techniques involved in making craftworks as social practices that were closely related to experiences in their lives based on a narrative approach. K.W. Arthur, who studied material culture and local knowledge among the Borada using ethno-archaeological approaches, described the changes in their local knowledge related to material cultures and religious practices over the last 100 years, especially after Protestantism was introduced to this area. She pointed out that Borada women more readily discussed their daily lives compared to men, based on life history data collected from both men and women among the Borada. The women's life histories involved relationships with religion, politics, and techniques.

Kaneko examined craft workers from the same perspective as K.W. Arthur, and also found that women preferred to talk about their pottery-making in their daily lives. She also described the changes in pot shapes and innovative new techniques related to the social and religious changes in the lives of Aari potters over the last 30 years. She called this techno-life history. The techno-life history data indicated that the potters' local knowledge and techniques have not only economic potential, which affected the lives of household members, but also empower woman potters to adopt new life styles, such as owning their own land and houses, instead of the land being owned by their fathers and husbands. Thubauville examined the local transmission of knowledge (e.g., knowledge of spinning, decorating calabashes, and learning the lyre) among brides during their seclusion period, which usually lasts about three months. Several case studies of the current transformations among the Maale indicated that girls' schooling, which is based on national development policy, and Maale marriage customs are in conflict.

The last three papers, by Samuel, Noguchi, and Minami & Shigeta, focus on livelihood activities other than craftwork. Samuel, who did his pre-doctoral research on the Hamar of southwestern Ethiopia, a semi-arid area, examined how the Hamar practice agriculture as a relatively new livelihood. Mainly Hamar women engaged in agriculture and they obtained new knowledge and developed new techniques. Regarding the potential for bias in knowledge and techniques depending on gender, he reported the same situation between Hamar boys and girls. According to his paper, Hamar girls had much easier access to modern school education than boys, who had to take their cattle to pasture every day.

Noguchi, conducted her pre-doctoral research on the Aari of southwestern

Ethiopia and described how aging affects their daily lives and social relationships. Although aging is not an urgent issue in Africa right now, the effects of modernization, which tends to have negative effects on local practices, might be a major influence on the community, especially the elders. Her research on 16 elders more than 60 years old found that they received perfect scores on a measure of their ability of daily livings (ADLs), and there is a big difference between male and female elders in terms of their daily practices and receiving supports. Minami & Shigeta, focusing on women's housewares, found no changes in their kinds and usage in the last 10 years. Although the plastic containers are increasing these days, the number of local products, such as pots and iron works, has not changed during last 10 years. They contended women's knowledge and techniques on usage of local crafts did not receive negative impacts from the influx of industrial goods.

We came to conclude that the gendered division of labors in Africa might limit the range of local knowledge and techniques of African people. On the other hand, in our long-term field observation and analysis of their practices in craft makings and livelihood activities, it was made possible for us to differentiate the real change and peculiarity of such knowledge and techniques from the same people's discourse. In this series of contributions, we intend to focus on the people's practices vis-à-vis "things" such as craftworks and their interconnections in their daily life. By doing so, we believe we can achieve the tangible approach to the nature of changes in the gender-based local knowledge and techniques and their positive practices in their life. We with all the authors trust that the focus of this forum will help elucidate the changing gender roles and transformation of African local communities.

NOTES

- (1) The members are engaged in the research project, "Engaged Area Studies in the Arena of African Local-Knowledge Formation and Sharing: Seeking the new images of community (Project number: 23251005)" which has been supported financially by the scientific research grant-in-aid of Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology since 2010.
- (2) We conducted a pre-forum that consisted of 11 poster presentations on March 26, 2011, because of Tohoku earthquake. Prof. Sugiyama (Hirosaki University) and Prof. Hayami (Kyoto University) joined as commentators. The results of that pre-forum were published in a Japanese book series, ZAIRAICHI, on March 15, 2013.
- (3) Prof. Goto Akira (Nanzan University) and Dr. Onishi Hideyuki (Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts) were commentators at the forum. In addition to oral presentations, there were 10 poster presentations. Prof. Sugiyama commented on these presentations.
- (4) Sigaut (1994) also proposed the concept of technical intelligence, which is based on social behavior practices (Sigaut, F. 1994. Technology. In (T. Ingold, ed.) *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, pp. 420–459. Routledge, Oxon and New York). Also see Thubauville in this volume, pp. 98–99.

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RESEARCH SITE OF CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS VOLUME



* The number on the map shows the chapter number in this volume.

Glossary of plant names appeared in this volume

coffee	<i>Coffea arabica</i>
corarima	<i>Aframomum corrorima</i>
ensete	<i>Ensete ventricosum</i>
Ethiopian kale	<i>Brassica</i> spp. including <i>B. carinata</i>
tef	<i>Eragrostis tef</i>